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CIRESS

is a world where magic dominates every aspect of daily life. For centuries, seven Guilds of magic have presided over this enchanted globe, owing much to the **Eternal Spirits** of their original Guild Masters. Living on as ethereal phantoms, each Eternal Spirit provided their Guild's current Master with timeless wisdom and sorcerous knowledge.

This ancient balance of power was shattered on the day **Genevieve Villard** was to become Master of the Nouveau Guild. At Gen's Rite of Ascension, a mysterious stranger imprinted a mystical sigil on the palm of her rebellious sister, **Giselle**. When the Sigil's power drew all seven Eternal Spirits into Giselle, a turbulent new era dawned for Ciress. Granted vast magical might, Giselle Villard reluctantly became the most powerful Mystic her world has ever known!

RECENTLY:

Giselle traveled to the far-off lands of the Shaman, Djinn, and Astral Guilds, where she helped the local Masters defeat their adversaries and learned from them the pearls of wisdom that make their Guilds unique. It seems that the mystic protector of Ciress is well on her way to finally earning the vast power she was given. But wisdom often comes at a heavy price, and Giselle is about to find in the land of the Tantric Guild that **Master Vashua** will not be so easy to win over...

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GOTTA CONFESS: I'VE BEEN *PUTTING OFF* THIS VISIT.
SEE... THERE'S NO GETTING AROUND IT: WITH YOU GUYS, SOONER OR LATER IT'S GONNA COME DOWN TO *SEX*.
NOT THAT THAT WOULD'VE BOTHERED ME *BEFORE*. BUT LATELY I'VE BEEN TRYING TO CHANGE MY WAYS.
I'M, uh... *NOT* THAT KIND OF GIRL ANYMORE.
I KNOW, I KNOW...YOU PEOPLE DON'T SEE IT THE SAME WAY WE DO. YOU *DON'T* MAKE AS BIG A DEAL OUT OF IT...
...AND AT THE SAME TIME YOU TAKE IT *MORE* SERIOUSLY. FUNNY HOW THAT WORKS, huh?
LISTEN TO ME RUNNING ON AND ON. I REALLY THOUGHT I'D HANDLE THIS A LOT *BETTER* WHEN THE TIME CAME. SO, uh...
...ARE YOU REALLY GONNA JUST STAND THERE *STARING* AT ME THE WHOLE TIME I CHANGE INTO THAT THING...?
I WAS MERELY WAITING FOR YOU TO STOP TALKING, GISELLE VILLARD--
--SO AS TO INFORM YOU THAT THE *DRESSING ALCOVE* IS BACK BEHIND THAT THIRD PILLAR.

Um, I *KNEW* THAT...

Y'KNOW, YOU SHOULD HEAR THE THINGS PEOPLE *SAY* ABOUT YOU FOLKS BACK AT HOME...

NO NEED TO EXPLAIN, MISS VILLARD. WE ARE *WELL AWARE* OF THE TANTRIC GUILD'S REPUTATION: *HEDONISTS* AND *LIBERTINES* BESOTTED BY FLESHLY DELIGHTS.

WELL...I WOULD'VE PUT IT A LITTLE *NICER*.

MASTER YASHUA LOOKS FORWARD TO *CLARIFYING* YOUR MISCONCEPTIONS.

SKITTER, WHERE DO YOU THINK *YOU'RE* GOING...?

?

HEY, *MUSCLES!*

FIND HIM A *KENNEL*...OR AT LEAST A *SANDBOX*, WOULD YOU?

ulp--!

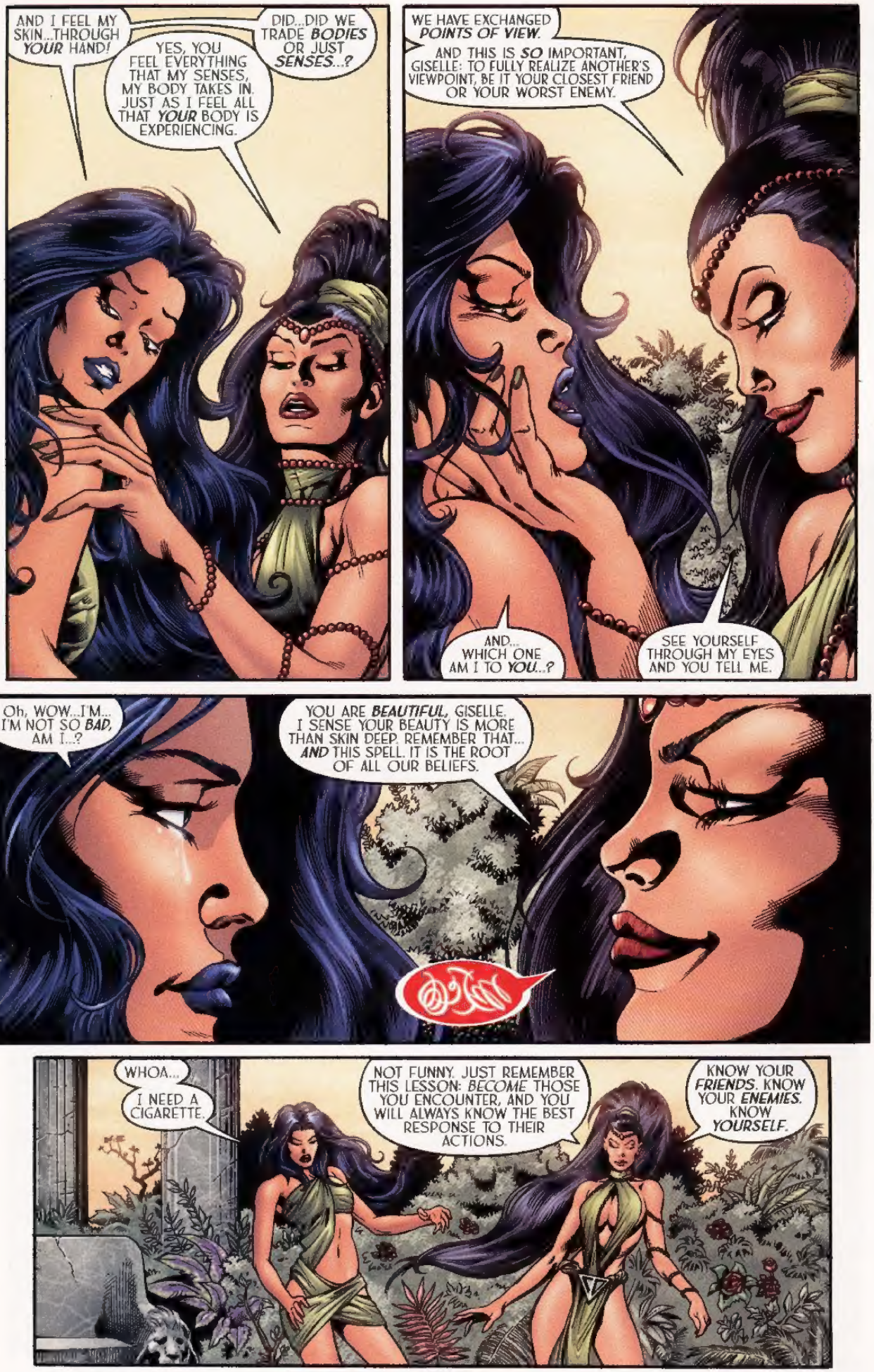
WE SHOULD HAVE ATTEMPTED IT THE MOMENT WE WERE TRAPPED HERE.
NOW, WE MUST CERTAINLY TRY IT BEFORE WE LOSE ANOTHER TO LECAVALIER'S INSIDIOUS CAMPAIGN.
Mmm... THERE IS DEFINITELY A NEW ELEMENT OF URGENCY, BUT THE RISK...
TRY WHAT, MAGUS?
THE MAGUS HAS A PLAN TO ESCAPE THE SPIRIT PLANE.
YES, ALAIN. EVEN YOU MUST TIRE OF BEING STUCK HERE LIKE A FLY IN A WEB--EVEN IF THE WEB IS THE MIND OF GISELLE VILLARD.
AND DON'T TRY TO TELL ME HOW FAR SHE HAS COME IN RECENT WEEKS...
I'M SURPRISED YOU EVEN KNOW OF GISELLE'S PROGRESS, CONSIDERING HOW LITTLE INTEREST YOU'VE SHOWN IN HER.
AND PRAY TELL, MAGUS, WHAT IS THE PLAN YOU PROPOSE?
THERE ARE OTHER ENTITIES THAT WALK THE SUBTLE PLANES, ALAIN LECAVALIER. I SAY WE STRIKE A BARGAIN WITH ONE--FEED IT THE GIRL'S SOUL IN EXCHANGE FOR OUR FREEDOM.
DOES YOUR CRUELTY KNOW NO BOUNDS?
AT LEAST I MAKE NO BONES ABOUT IT. YOU CLOUD OUR JUDGMENT ONE BY ONE.
YOU'VE SEDUCED THE SHAMAN, DJINN AND ASTRAL SPIRITS TO HER CAUSE.
I CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE THEY FELL FOR SUCH CLAPTRAP!

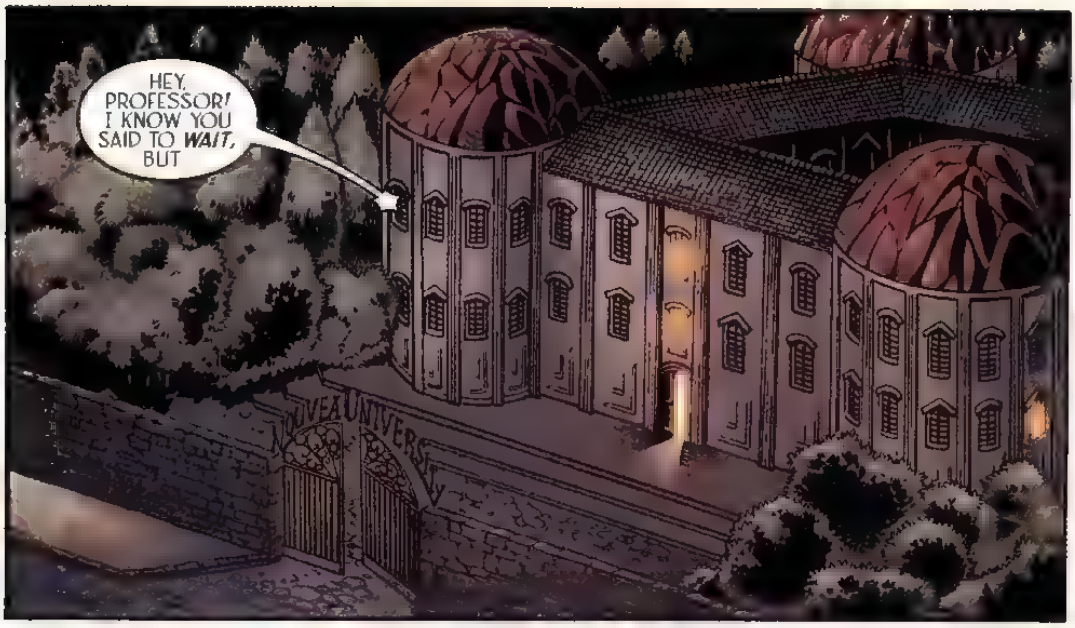
GISELLE WON THEIR APPROVAL FAIRLY, BY DINT OF HER COURAGE AND CHARACTER -- TWO VIRTUES OF WHICH YOU KNOW NOTHING!
I KNOW A BACKSTABBING SNAKE WHEN I SEE ONE. ALL YOUR HONEYED WORDS WON'T OBSCURE YOUR BID TO CONTROL US!
ALAIN! RESTRAIN YOURSELF!
MAGUS, THIS IS NO WAY TO WIN MY SUPPORT!
BUT, HEROTUS! HE SULLIES SOMETHING NOBLE! WATCHING GISELLE FINALLY GROW UP IS ONE OF THE MOST GRATIFYING THINGS I'VE EVER SEEN.
JUDGE FOR YOURSELF WHO'S RIGHT -- SHE'S AT THE TANTRIC CATHEDRAL EVEN NOW, AWAITING AN AUDIENCE WITH MASTER VASHUA!
VERY WELL, I SHALL. BUT I'LL NOT HAVE ANY OF YOU TAINT MY OPINION ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. LEAVE ME, AND I SHALL TELL YOU IF SHE FAILS OR SUCCEEDS.
VASHUA IS THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED TANTRIC MASTER SINCE... WELL, SINCE MYSELF. SHE'LL SORT THIS GIRL OUT SOON ENOUGH...

WELL...? COME ON *OUT!*
BUT... BUT...oh, *ALL RIGHT...!*
YOU LOOK *SPLENDID,* GISELLE VILLARD! CLEARLY, YOU TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR BODY. WHY *HIDE* IT?
WELL, I'M NOT USUALLY THIS SELF-CONSCIOUS. SOME OF THE OUTFITS I USED TO GO CLUBBING IN MAKE THIS THING LOOK *PRUDISH.* IT'S JUST...
...BACK AT HOME, WHEN FOLKS CHECK YOU OUT, AT LEAST THEY PRETEND *NOT* TO. HERE, YOU GUYS *OGLE* SHAMELESSLY...! IT'S KINDA CREEPY...
WE DO NOT *"OGLE."* WE RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE BEAUTY OPENLY. WHAT WE FIND REPULSIVE IS *FALSE MODESTY.*
LEAVE US, EVERYONE. I WILL GRANT OUR GUEST THE KINDNESS OF A PRIVATE AUDIENCE...
...BUT YOU WILL HAVE TO LET GO OF YOUR INHIBITIONS, GISELLE, IF YOU SERIOUSLY EXPECT TO LEARN THE MAGIC OF *INTIMACY.*
Y'KNOW, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M TOTALLY INEXPERIENCED, WHEN IT COMES TO, YOU KNOW... *"INTIMACY."*
YOU SPEAK OF THE TAWDRY LIASONS OF YOUTH. I SPEAK OF SOMETHING FAR *BEYOND* A PHYSICAL COUPLING.

ALL YOUR PREVIOUS UNIONS WERE ABOUT *YOU*--FULFILLING YOUR NEED TO BE LOVED AND DESIRED. YOUR BODY WAS THE *CURRENCY* YOU SPENT TO SATISFY THOSE NEEDS.
THAT'S KINDA PRESUMPTUOUS. *TRUE,* BUT PRESUMPTUOUS.
YOU MUST *NEVER* BARTER YOURSELF. THE BODY IS A *TEMPLE,* NOT A MARKET...
...JUST AS THE *SENSES* ARE THE CHARIOT OF EXPERIENCE, THE *MIND* THE VEHICLE, AND *CONSCIOUSNESS* THE SCREEN OF THE SOUL.
...Uh-*huh.* AND, uh...THAT *MEANS*...?
MICO
=GASP=

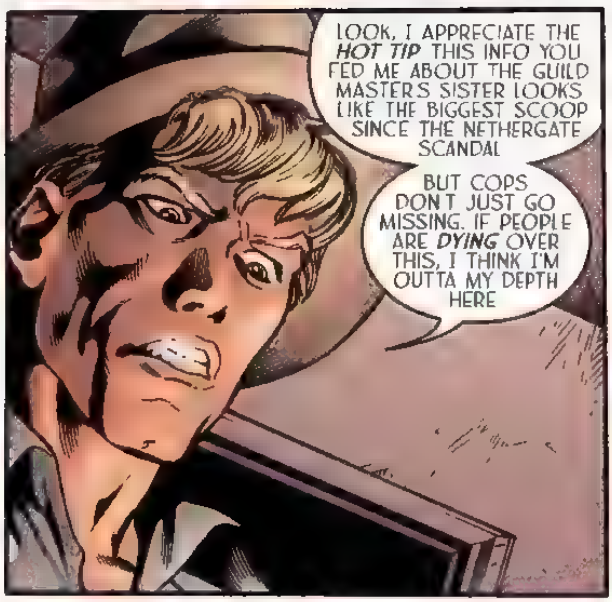
WH... WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE*...?
SEVEN SPIRITS, I CAN *SEE* MYSELF... THROUGH *YOUR* EYES?!

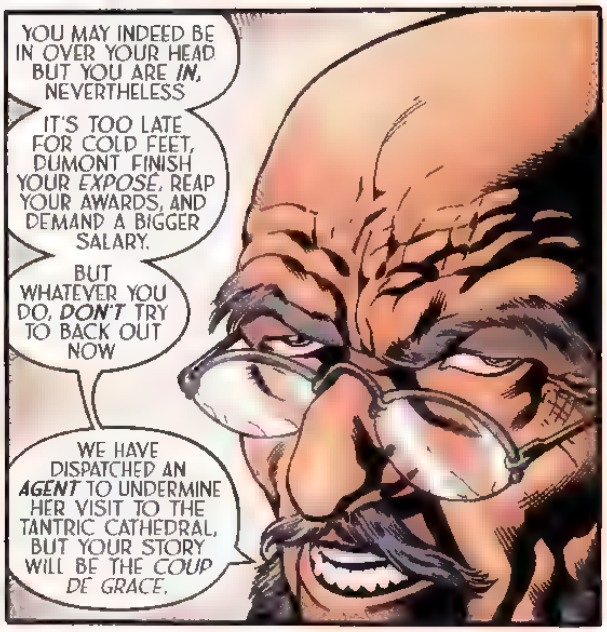

AND I FEEL MY SKIN...THROUGH *YOUR* HAND!
YES, YOU FEEL EVERYTHING THAT MY SENSES, MY BODY TAKES IN. JUST AS I FEEL ALL THAT *YOUR* BODY IS EXPERIENCING.
DID...DID WE TRADE *BODIES* OR JUST *SENSES*...?
WE HAVE EXCHANGED *POINTS OF VIEW*.
AND THIS IS *SO* IMPORTANT, GISELLE: TO FULLY REALIZE ANOTHER'S VIEWPOINT, BE IT YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND OR YOUR WORST ENEMY.
AND... WHICH ONE AM I TO *YOU*...?
SEE YOURSELF THROUGH MY EYES AND YOU TELL ME.
Oh, WOW...I'M... I'M NOT SO *BAD*, AM I...?
YOU ARE *BEAUTIFUL*, GISELLE. I SENSE YOUR BEAUTY IS MORE THAN SKIN DEEP. REMEMBER THAT... *AND* THIS SPELL. IT IS THE ROOT OF ALL OUR BELIEFS.
WHOA... I NEED A CIGARETTE.
NOT FUNNY. JUST REMEMBER THIS LESSON: *BECOME* THOSE YOU ENCOUNTER, AND YOU WILL ALWAYS KNOW THE BEST RESPONSE TO THEIR ACTIONS.
KNOW YOUR *FRIENDS*. KNOW YOUR *ENEMIES*. KNOW *YOURSELF*.


HEY, PROFESSOR! I KNOW YOU SAID TO *WAIT*, BUT

WHAT ARE YOU *DOING* HERE?
LECTURE HALL 3 ADVANCED GUILD STUDIES
WE GOTTA *TALK!* IT'S ABOUT THAT MISSING *DETECTIVE*...

DETECTIVE DEVEREAUX IS NO LONGER ANY CONCERN OF YOURS, OR ANYONE *ELSE*.
YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME HERE, MISTER DUMONT OUR ARRANGEMENT WAS *CLEAR:* WE CONTACT YOU, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND
YEAH, BUT


LOOK, I APPRECIATE THE *HOT TIP* THIS INFO YOU FED ME ABOUT THE GUILD MASTER'S SISTER LOOKS LIKE THE BIGGEST SCOOP SINCE THE NETHERGATE SCANDAL
BUT COPS DON'T JUST GO MISSING. IF PEOPLE ARE *DYING* OVER THIS, I THINK I'M OUTTA MY DEPTH HERE


YOU MAY INDEED BE IN OVER YOUR HEAD BUT YOU ARE *IN*, NEVERTHELESS
IT'S TOO LATE FOR COLD FEET, DUMONT FINISH YOUR *EXPOSÉ*, REAP YOUR AWARDS, AND DEMAND A BIGGER SALARY.
BUT WHATEVER YOU DO, *DON'T* TRY TO BACK OUT NOW
WE HAVE DISPATCHED AN *AGENT* TO UNDERMINE HER VISIT TO THE TANTRIC CATHEDRAL, BUT YOUR STORY WILL BE THE *COUP DE GRACE*.

PSSST... HE MUSCLES
MISS VILLARD?! BUT.. I JUST SAW YOU TO YOUR BEDCHAMBER YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO *REMAIN* THERE
YOU HAVE TO *HELP* ME NO ONE ELSE *CAN*
YOUR MASTER *DID* SOMETHING TO ME TODAY. SOMETHING THAT LEFT ME WITH THIS TERRIBLE *ITCH*
AND IT'S IN A SPOT I JUST CAN'T SEEM TO *SCRATCH*...
I'M *FLATTERED*, BUT WHAT YOU FEEL IS COMMON IN FIRST-YEAR ACOLYTES. A SIMPLE EXERCISE WILL

I DID NOT COME TO EXERCISE, YOU IDIOT
I CAME TO FEED!

MASTER ZAI, MASTER ATYAAH, MASTER MONDRU, AND YOUR SISTER ALL URGED ME TO ALLOW YOUR VISIT AND TUTOR YOU IN OUR WAYS, AND STILL I FELT MISGIVINGS
NOW I KNOW WHY
THEY... THEY TOLD ME SOMEONE WAS MURDERED ?
AS THOUGH YOU DO NOT ALREADY KNOW WHO THE VICTIM IS!
WASN'T HE ? OH, NO HE WAS MY
HE WAS ASSIGNED TO SEE TO YOUR EVERY NEED, AND LOOK WHAT HE GOT FOR HIS TROUBLE DOES THAT MARK SEEM FAMILIAR?
I WAS THERE WHEN YOU SUCKED THE LIFE OUT OF ANIMORA WITH THAT CURSED SIGIL ON YOUR PALM! WHY DID YOU DO IT TO MY ACOLYTE?!

I *DIDN'T* DO THIS!
EITHER THERE'S SOMEONE *ELSE* OUT THERE LIKE ME, WHICH I SERIOUSLY *DOUBT*...
...OR SOMEONE IS TRYING TO *FRAME* ME. SOMEONE WHO KNOWS *WAY* TOO MUCH ABOUT ME

MY SECURITY GUARDS WILL DETERMINE THE TRUTH OF WHAT YOU SAY, BUT *YOU* WILL REMAIN IN CUSTODY
I WILL NOT HAVE MY MAIN *SUSPECT* IMPEDING THE INVESTIGATION

TRY AND *STOP* ME
YOUR ACOLYTE WAS A NICE GUY--HE DIDN'T *DESERVE* THIS ESPECIALLY NOT ON *MY* ACCOLINT!

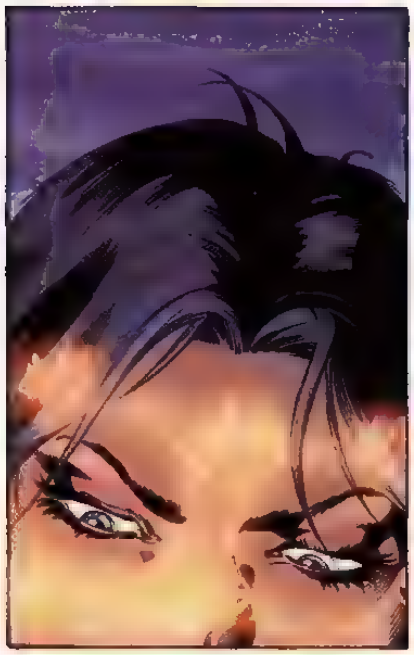
THERE IS, OF COURSE, *ANOTHER* POSSIBILITY
YES, I KNOW. EITHER WAY, OUR SANCTUM IS *VIOLATED*, AND I MUST FIRST IDENTIFY OUR *TRUE* ENEMY IF I AM TO KNOW HOW TO STRIKE BACK.

SPIRITS.. ? I HOPE YOU GUYS ARE WATCHING, BECAUSE THINGS ARE GETTING UGLY HERE
CAN YOU PLEASE GET THE TANTRIC SPIRIT TO SPEAK TO ME.. PLEASE...?
I AM HERE, GISELLE I AM THE ONLY ONE CURRENTLY MONITORING YOUR PROGRESS
AND I MUST TELL YOU HOW BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED I AM THAT ONE OF MY CHILDREN IS DEAD BECAUSE OF YOU.
WHAT?! I DIDN'T KILL HIM! YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT IF YOU'VE BEEN WATCHING!
YOU HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE TO FIND THE KILLER AND THE POWER TO DESTROY IT. WHY HAVE YOU NOT DONE SO?
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SO QUICKLY HOW TO SEE DISTURBANCES IN THE UNIVERSAL ENERGIES?

DID MASTER ATYAAH WASTE HIS TIME TEACHING YOU DJINN SPELLS?
YOU JUST WATCH...

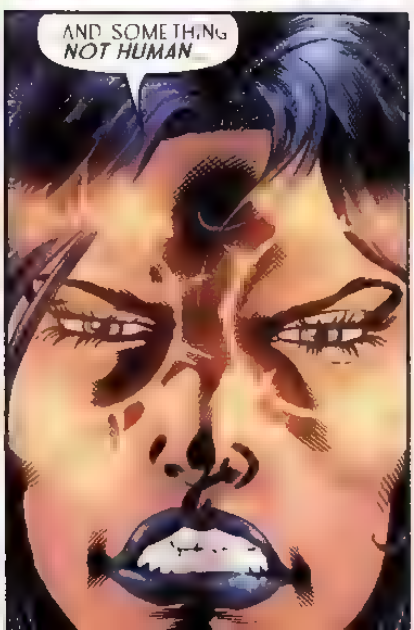
OKAY, WHO'S HERE TONIGHT. ?

SOME GUARDS



ACOLYTES

MORE STAFF


AND SOMETHING NOT HUMAN

WHAT IN THE INFERNAL PLANES ARE YOU?!

WAIT!

OOF!

HOLD ON I'LL GET HELP

GET AWAY FROM HER!

WAIT A MINUTE! I'M NOT THE ONE WHO DID THIS--IT WAS SOME KIND OF INFERNAL MINION
IT HAD BIG BAT-WINGS, AND IT TURNED TO SMOKE WHEN I SURPRISED IT
MASTER, IF WHAT SHE'S SAYING IS TRUE !
SHE COULD HAVE SIMPLY LEARNED OF THE SUCCUBUS IN A DEMONOLOG CAL TOME. AND--
SUCCUBUS? IS THAT WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST?
AND HOW CAN YOU EVEN THINK I'D BE BEHIND THIS STUFF AFTER WE MERGED, OR WHATEVER?!
DIDN'T YOU LEARN ANYTHING ABOUT ME?!

THE SUCCUBUS IS A BREED OF INFERNAL MINION THAT SEDUCES ITS VICTIMS, THEN DRAINS THEM OF LIFE AS THEY ARE CAUGHT IN ITS EMBRACE.
IF THEY APPEAR IN MALE FORM, THEY ARE SOMETIMES CALLED INCUBUS, BUT THEY DO NOT TRULY HAVE A GENDER
THEY MERELY APPEAR AS WHATEVER THE VICTIM FINDS ATTRACTIVE
THEY ARE AN ABSOLUTE ABOMINATION TO MY GUILD THEY USE INTIMACY AS A TRAP THEY MAKE A MOCKERY OF OUR MOST SACRED BELIEFS.
UNFORTUNATELY, OUR CARNAL NATURE MAKES US SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE SUCCUBUS ATTACK WHEN ONE PREYS ON A TANTRIC TEMPLE IT CAN QUICKLY DECIMATE THAT CONCLAVE
BUT NEVER HAS ONE INVADED THE TANTRIC CATHEDRAL! SEE WHAT YOU HAVE VISITED UPON US?
BUT, I TOLD YOU I DIDN'T--
I DON'T CARE IF YOU INTENDED IT, MISERY FOLLOWS YOU WHEREVER YOU GO!
GET OUT, GISELLE VILLARD! IT WAS A MISTAKE EVER ALLOWING YOU WITHIN THESE WALLS!

I DON'T BELIEVE THIS ... EVERYTHING WAS GOING SO WELL
THEY WERE ALL TOO READY TO BELIEVE YOU WOULD TURN ON THEM
MAKES ONE WONDER IF IT IS EVEN *WORTH* IT, SUCKING UP TO THESE GUILD MASTERS, ONE AFTER THE NEXT
START TALKING, PAL. HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT MY *SIGIL*, AND WHY DID YOU *FORGE* IT ON THOSE POOR PEOPLE YOU DRAINED BACK THERE?
AND WHY IN THE *WORLD* WOULD YOU APPEAR TO ME LIKE THIS WHEN YOU KNOW I'M OUT TO *GET* YOU?

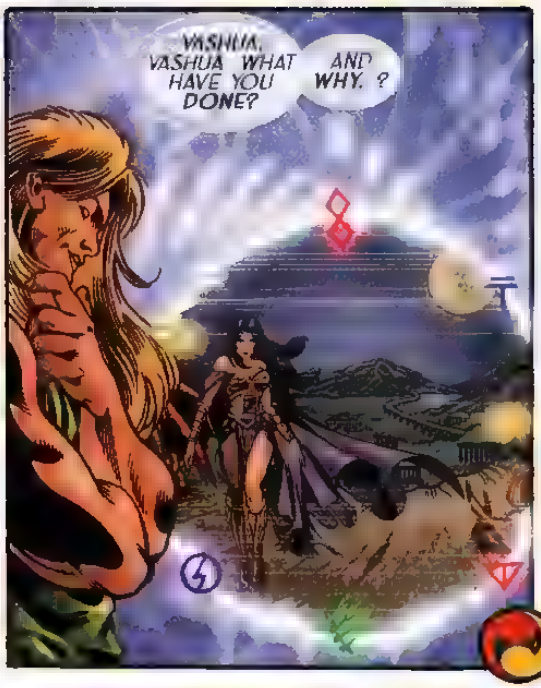
MY MASTERS BADE ME *SPEAK* W TH YOU AND EXTEND AN INVITATION. THEY ARE MOST EAGER TO *BEFRIEND* YOU
Giselle, **don't listen!** Whatever this thing says, it's all to **seduce** you That's all it does it **lies** and it **kills!**
THE MASTERS DID NOT WARN ME ABOUT ANY *TALKING SQUITS*..
APPARENTLY, THEY DIDN'T WARN YOU ENOUGH ABOUT *ME*.

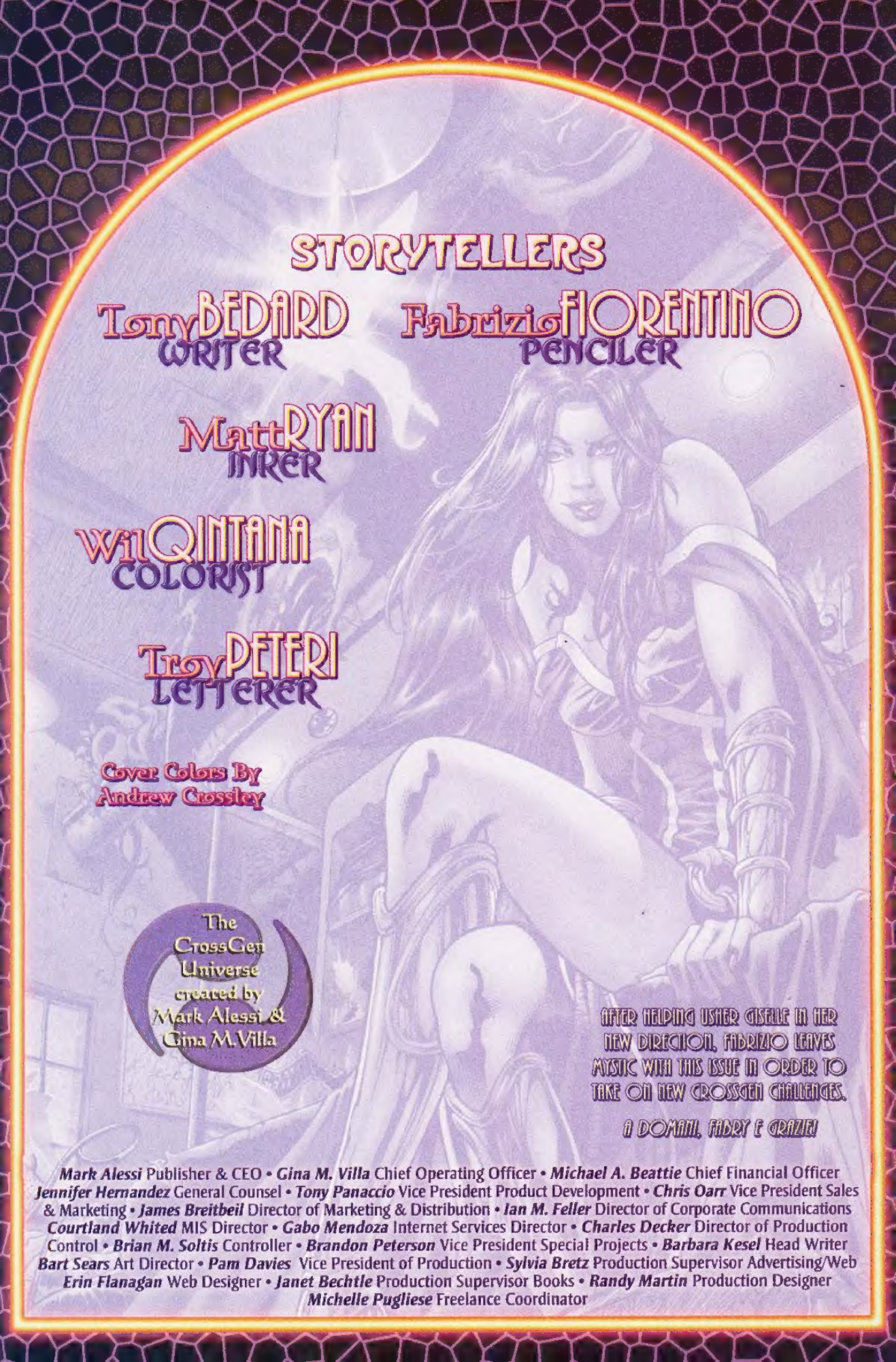
Giselle! You okay? Why'd you do that?!
That was the master spell Vashua showed you, right? What did you think would happen, seeing the world through a demon's eyes?
Haughhh

IT WAS HORRIBLE...SEEING PEOPLE AS FOOD... EMOTIONS AS STRINGS TO BE PULLED. ITS MIND WAS SO COLD AND UGLY...
..BUT I KNEW IT WOULD BE EVEN WORSE FOR THAT MONSTER.

SEEING ITSELF THROUGH MY EYES..UNDERSTANDING FOR A FLEETING MOMENT THE DEPTHS OF ITS CRIMES.
SEEING PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS AND LOVE AS SACRED..
...I THINK IT CRACKED WHATEVER PASSES FOR SANITY INSIDE THAT TWISTED BRAIN

A TANTRIC SECURITY PATROL SHOULD FIND HIM BEFORE THE NIGHT IS THROUGH
Maybe then they'll realize what a mistake they made with you


VASHUA, VASHUA WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
AND WHY. ?



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AFTER HELPING USHER GISELLE IN HER NEW DIRECTION, FABRIZIO LEAVES MYSTIC WITH THIS ISSUE IN ORDER TO TAKE ON NEW CROSSGEN CHALLENGES.

A DOMANI, FABRY E GRAZIE!

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MYSTIC
I Love You TO DEATH
PARIS
Issue #30
In Stores
November 6th

MYSTICISMS

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS PRINTED. MARK YOUR E-MAILS AS "OKAY TO PRINT." LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR CONTENT AND LENGTH.

Some of you might recall the contest referred to in the letter below. I received it too late to include in last week's books, but it is eminently worth publishing now. We'll be sure it runs in the next issue of the books we missed. Meanwhile, hearty congratulations to Don Smith! This wasn't an easy contest to win, and he deserves every penny of that $20,000!

Mark, Gina, and Crew,

As the winner of the "CrossGen Break the Bank Trivia Contest!" it was a pleasure to meet you in San Diego!

The purpose of this letter is twofold. First, I want to thank you and your crew for hours and hours (literally) of entertainment, for the rich and intricate universe you have put together. You have assembled an amazing team from writers and artists to the support troops, some of whom I have been privileged to meet. You should all be very proud of the works you have produced. Second, I want to give some idea of the richness of the hunt I experienced in submitting my entry to the "Break the Bank" Contest.

I have been a fan of your books from day one. You offered a simple guarantee – try CROSSGEN CHRONICLES and the first three issues of any of your initial books: MYSTIC, SIGIL, SCION, or MERIDIAN. *Read 'em.* If unsatisfied, return the books for a full refund! This was unheard of! You promised quality stories, on time (!), with no gimmicks (i.e. no variant covers). A simple philosophy, taking comics back to what they used to be – books to be read, with solid stories and direction, that created anticipation for the next issue – and then delivered it on time! I bought all of your books and quickly found them to be my favorites. I'd bet you had very few takers for refunds!

I found myself reading your books cover to cover. The *Milestones* columns and staff bios provided interesting background information on the development of your philosophy, the assembly of your initial staff, and other highlights of the beginnings of CrossGen Comics. Most importantly, you successfully created self-contained stories that could be read and enjoyed title by title. And underlying them all – amazing and surprising depth; an intricate, interrelated universe with a common thread – the stories of the Sigil-Bearers! There is so, so much more to these stories than the typical three-to-four-issue story arcs you find in most of the comics world. As you have said, you can read and enjoy a single title, but, if you truly want to appreciate them – read them all! I found my subscription list automatically growing with each new title you offered.

I originally saw your contest published in the *Wizard CrossGen Special Edition* with an amazing prize of $10,000. At that time, I told my fiancé, Karen, that I should enter your contest since I had every book you had published and thoroughly enjoyed reading them. But, for one reason or another, the deadline passed and I had only scribbled out a few of the obvious answers. So your original contest came and went, and I failed to submit an entry. I regretted that and searched for any indication of a winner for the contest on your website or in *Wizard*. No sign of a winner! Did I miss it? Then I saw it! *No winner!* And then you guys did the unbelievable – *you doubled the prize!* The gauntlet had been thrown. There was no way I was going to let this challenge go without at least sending in a submission. I declared to Karen that I was going to win this contest!

So I dug in. Some of the questions were quite simple and straightforward and could be answered off the top of my head (i.e. the mentors' shared physical trait). Others took a few minutes to pull the right book and get the answer (which of Mordath's officers is charged with capturing Arwyn in SOJOURN). Just as you have done with the stories in your books, I soon found that the questions in this contest had multiple layers and depth. The books came out of the boxes. I had piles of CrossGen books all over the place! I felt like I was doing a research paper, but the source material was *comic books!* I found myself literally taking notes as I followed threads from one book and title to another.

I re-read books I had not picked up since the first week they were published! When I originally read them, I jumped from title to title as they came out. This time I read each title in order, issue by issue, hunting for details, answers that were contained within a single title. I found that in reading the books again in search of the answers there was so much that I had missed the first time around! And the questions got tougher and trickier! Be careful, now, with the answer to the current members of the High Councils of Houses Dexter and Sinister! No, the mythical creature of MERIDIAN is not the Celanaug! Keep digging!

An amazing thing happened! The hunt turned into a quest! Like Trenin the Hunter, I was not to be denied! Okay…Thierry's gork is named Alphonse, but who is it named after? I read MYSTIC again…and again… where is it? Maybe it's in CROSSGEN ILLUSTRATED! No! How devious can you guys be? Damn – off to the comic shop to get the trade. Now I was really in deep!

Then I hit the tough questions! And, to

my delight, appropriately for the graphic medium of comics, I found my hunt moving from the words to pictures! Clues from words and art combined to form questions, leading to answers! No, Seahn's father is not Trenin! "Doesn't he look familiar?" – aha! Where is Altwaal? Follow the trail of the clues…no, it's not in THE FIRST, but the clues are. The questions keep coming – where are Altwaal's weapons? Not only *where* is Altwaal, but *who* is Altwaal? This universe is all about symbols! There he is!

Then it came down to one question and the entry had to be in the mail the next day! What is the true identity of the detective in RUSE? An almost sleepless night…I read the RUSE books over and over. Look closely at things around Simon! Okay…so which character is it? So, I take a leap and throw in my answer. One submission: all my eggs in one basket, submitted on the deadline!

Then I wait. Then, I get the call from Ian Feller! I *won!* And, I got them *all correct!* I was bouncing off the walls! I still can't believe it! Then Ian tells me you are going to fly me to the San Diego ComiCon and where you and Gareb Shamus from *Wizard* would present me with the big check! I thought I had died and gone to comic heaven!

In San Diego, my family and I had the privilege of meeting many of your staff and creative team members. A special thanks to Michelle Pugliese for handling all the admin stuff courteously and efficiently, John Smith for his entertaining discussions of your recent movie deals and of his appearances in your books, and Barbara Kesel for her time and impassioned and entertaining comments about comics and curriculum – getting kids to read. Although your people were extremely busy, they all took time to treat my family as part of your family! Thank you! Thank you and your staff again, Mark, for hours and hours of entertainment!

Well, the hunt for the contest may be over – but the questions raised in the hunt continue – so on I go… you guys and your damn teasers!

Don (in awe of the tale you have put together!) Smith
San Jose, CA

via snail mail:
CrossGeneration Comics, Inc.
4023 Tampa Road, Suite 2400
Oldsmar, Florida 34677

or via e-mail:
letters@crossgen.com
MYSTIC (in the subject line)

CROSSCURRENTS

by Gina Villa

I get a chance to read a considerable number of letters around here. I never think of it as a chore because it's a part of my job that I really love. No matter what sentiments a letter contains, and no matter how well or poorly those sentiments are expressed, I feel as if the act of reading the thoughts of someone out there who has taken the time and effort to send them gives me a particular connection to each person who writes. A lot of these missives are memorable for one reason or another, but every now and then one arrives that is worthy of special note. Just such a one crossed my desk early last week. It made me very proud…and at the same time very humble. Here it is. You'll see what I mean.

To Everyone at CrossGen Comics,

I want to thank you for all your great comics. I've been a collector of comics for over 20 years and I'm glad to say that you guys and gals are a breath of fresh air to the industry. This past year has been tough for our whole country since 9/11/01. There's not much for me to do to get my mind off the event. You see, I am a Port Authority Police officer. Every day at work I'm reminded of what happened. For the past few months I have mainly worked at the WTC site. My job requires me to work 14 hours per day all the time. As you can see, my co-workers and myself don't have much of a life now; we do what we can to stay sane. One of my ways to get away is to read your comics. I love SIGIL, SOJOURN, CRUX, SCION, NEGATION, etc. Your comics help me to escape reality for a while. I don't want to take up much of your time, so thanks again. Keep up all the great work.

P.S. I am sending you a Port Authority Police patch. If there is anything else I can get you guys – T-shirts, hats, etc. – let me know. Please do not print my name or address.

CROSSGENERATION COMICS, INC. RECOMMENDED GOOD READ!

Recommended R Reads

by CrossGen Senior Writer Ron Marz

Fantastic Four, published by Marvel Comics, written by Mark Waid, art by Mike Wieringo, Karl Kesel and Paul Mounts .

When I was a kid I used to look at my older brother's *Fantastic Four* comics and get creeped out by the Kirby artwork. To my young eyes it seemed somehow scary, even grotesque ... although I kept going back. Ah, the ignorance of youth. Of course, I now realize Jack and Stan's run on *FF* was perhaps Marvel's greatest achievement. Presently a new team is recapturing some of what made *Fantastic Four* a seminal series, beginning with issue #60, the much-ballyhooed 9-cent issue. Waid's story is a perfect introduction for new or lapsed readers and Ringo's art is a bouncy complement. Most importantly, this team understands (and makes clear) that Reed, Sue, Ben, and Johnny have never been superheroes. They're a family who get caught up in amazing adventures. I'm once again looking forward to reading those adventures. Worth every penny, even when it goes back to regular price.